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ABSTRACT

This publication provides a general description, in question-and-answer format, of the 1999 Utah Statewide Testing Program. Under this program, norm-referenced achievement tests are administered to Utah students in grades 5, 8, and 11 under a legislative mandate. The newest edition of the Stanford Achievement Tests, the Stanford 9, was chosen as the test series for 1999. Test administration conditions, including the use of calculators, and test preparation are discussed. What the tests measure, who pays for them, and how they are used are described. (SLD)

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ED 434 933

Questions & Answers About

The Utah Statewide Testing Program

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT

THE UTAH STATEWIDE TESTING PROGRAM FOR 1999-2000

Critical Information for Teachers and Administrators

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May 1999

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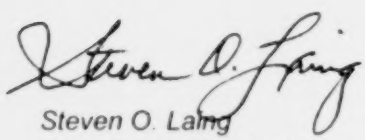
FOREWORD

The 1990 Utah Legislature enacted a set of laws dealing with testing and accountability. Specifically, these laws mandate the administration of the same norm-referenced achievement test statewide to students in grades five, eight, and eleven. Public reporting of school and district averages from this program is also required.

In fall 1997, we began use of a new edition of the Stanford Achievement Test—Stanford 9. This new test was chosen by the State Testing Committee for administration in this program. In most schools, testing will take place from the last two weeks in September through the first week of October. Through a legislative appropriation, all tests, answer sheets, and other testing materials are purchased by the Utah State Office of Education and provided to local school districts and schools for administration. Likewise, the Utah State Office of Education bears all costs of scoring and reporting the tests administered at grades five, eight, and eleven.

During the last nine years, the implementation of the Statewide Testing Program for the state of Utah carried with it numerous challenges that Utah educators had not previously faced. Utah educators have responded positively to this educational accountability picture. I know you will continue to implement this program in a thorough and professional manner.

This publication will provide educators, students, and parents with a general description of the 1999 Utah Statewide Testing Program. We hope this information will increase understanding of the program and of the continuing effort of all Utah educators to provide a quality education to every student.



Steven O. Laing
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE UTAH STATEWIDE TESTING PROGRAM FOR 1999-2000

QUESTION: **What is the Utah Statewide Testing Program?**

ANSWER: It is a legislatively mandated uniform statewide testing program that calls for the administration of the same standardized achievement test to essentially all Utah students in grades five, eight, and eleven.

QUESTION: **What is the legal basis for statewide testing?**

ANSWER: The 1990 Utah Legislature created the Statewide Testing Program by the passage of Sections 53A-1-601 through 53A-1-610, Utah Code Annotated. These laws mandate a uniform state testing program across Utah's 40 districts, as well as the public reporting of district and school averages from this uniform state testing program.

QUESTION: **Who has responsibility for administering and planning the Statewide Testing Program?**

ANSWER: Formal responsibility for creating and planning this program is vested with the Utah State Board and the Utah State Office of Education. The State Superintendent, in conjunction with school district superintendents, has appointed a State Testing Committee, which has accomplished detailed planning and established guidelines for conducting the Statewide Testing Program. The State Testing Committee is made up of representatives from nine of Utah's 40 school districts, as well as five staff members from the Utah State Office of Education. Dr. Barbara J. Lawrence of the Utah State Office of Education is the chairman of the State Testing Committee and director of the Statewide Testing Program.

QUESTION: **Who is responsible for the Statewide Testing Program at the district level?**

ANSWER: Each district has identified a testing director who is responsible for coordinating the Statewide Testing Program at the district level. District testing directors for all 40 school districts are listed on the last page of this document.

QUESTION: **When will testing take place in 1999?**

ANSWER: For most schools, tests will be administered in the period of time between September 20 and October 6. Districts with year-round schools will establish a special testing schedule to accommodate the needs of the year-round programs.

QUESTION: **Why is this program using fall test administration?**

ANSWER: The State Testing Committee, in consultation with district superintendents, looked carefully at the issue of fall versus spring test administration. Several factors were persuasive in the choice of fall test administration:

1. *All Utah school districts are involved in the administration of the state Core Assessment criterion-referenced tests during the spring.*

2. *At the secondary level, testing programs such as the American College Test (ACT), Advanced Placement (AP), and the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) are all spring programs.*

3. *At all levels, student activities reach a high point during the spring.*

4. *Fall testing stresses the fact that the program is designed to measure the impact of the* ***educational system****, not what happens during a single school year. This program is neither intended nor designed to be a teacher evaluation system.*

5. *Fall norms provide a picture of student performance which is just as accurate as spring norms.*

QUESTION: **What test is used for this program?**

ANSWER: Based on an extensive evaluation of proposals submitted by all the major test publishers, the State Testing Committee selected the newest edition of the Stanford Achievement Test, Stanford 9, for use in the Statewide Testing Program. For grades five and eight, the full-length version of the test is administered to provide detailed profiles of individual student achievement in basic skills areas. For grade eleven, an abbreviated version of the test is used.

QUESTION: **How is testing different now that we are using a new test?**

ANSWER: Essentially, the testing process has remained the same. However, for the first time in the Statewide Testing Program, students will be allowed to use calculators and rulers for ***specified portions of the mathematics subtest*** at grades five, eight, and eleven. Districts are required to ensure that a calculator and ruler are available for every student at the appropriate time during testing.

QUESTION: **How does Stanford 9 differ from Stanford 8?**

ANSWER: Some of the major differences include:

- ***Enhanced Multiple-Choice Questions.*** *To more effectively assess the Thinking Skills objectives in Stanford 9, Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement has created a new type of multiple-choice test item called enhanced multiple-choice. This item type requires the student to perform specific tasks in order to respond to the question. Such test questions are also designed to reflect real-life situations, measure strategies or processes, and integrate process with knowledge.*

- ***Commissioned Reading Passages and Illustrations.*** *To represent the literature-based curricula taught in many classrooms, the Reading Comprehension selections include original short stories and articles written by published children's writers. In addition, much of the artwork was created by published illustrators of children's books and magazines.*

- ***Language Test Emphasis on Development of Effective Written Communication.*** *The Stanford 9 Language Test combines mechanics and expression into one subtest. Further, it supports the composing and editing stages of the writing process model.*

- ***Spelling in Context.*** *All Stanford 9 Spelling items are presented in context. The objectives of the tests are based on the phonetic and structural principles of spelling.*

- ***Shorter Administration Time.*** *Stanford 9 is shorter than Stanford 8. The result is that administration time is approximately 10 percent less than the previous edition.*

QUESTION: **Who will administer the tests?**

ANSWER: When possible, students should be tested in a classroom situation by their own teachers. Large group test administration is not encouraged, but where it does need to occur, counselors and administrators should be heavily involved in such a procedure.

QUESTION: **Will all students in grades five, eight, and eleven be tested?**

ANSWER: It is the intent of the program to test virtually all students. Specific criteria for exempting students who ***cannot participate meaningfully*** in the testing are provided to teachers and administrators. ***Basically, students who would be excluded would be those with very limited English proficiency or students who have an IEP and are judged by an IEP team or equivalent group as incapable of participating meaningfully in the testing.*** Specific forms are provided to document reasons for exempting any student from the testing. ***Students who qualify for exemption from testing should not be given the Stanford Achievement Test.***

QUESTION: **What percentage of students took the tests in 1998?**

ANSWER: At both grades five and eight, approximately 95 percent of the enrolled students statewide took the Stanford Achievement Test. At grade eleven, 90 percent of enrolled students took the test.

QUESTION: **Can the students use calculators for the Stanford Math Test at grades five, eight, and eleven?**

ANSWER: ***Yes***. In order to ensure fairness and have uniform test administration across the entire state, districts ***must*** ensure that calculators and rulers with both English and metric measures are available to all students during ***specified portions*** of the math tests. ***(NOTE: Calculators are only used for the problem-solving portion of the math subtest at grades five and eight and for the entire test at grade eleven. Any calculator may be used. Similarly, any ruler will do as long as it has both English and metric measures. Students may use their own calculator and ruler or those furnished by the district.)***

QUESTION: **How long does it take to administer the tests?**

ANSWER: At grades five and eight, total testing time is approximately five hours. At grade eleven, testing time is about two hours.

QUESTION: **What about make-up testing?**

ANSWER: In general, make-up testing should be accomplished to the extent reasonable in each school. It is important that make-up testing procedures be carried out in a manner as close to regular testing procedures as possible.

QUESTION: **When must testing be completed?**

ANSWER: Tests should be completed and returned by the principal to the district testing director **no later than October 6, 1999**. District testing directors should return all answer sheets to the Utah State Office of Education no later than October 13, 1999.

QUESTION: **What is being done to ensure high quality test administration and test security?**

ANSWER: All schools will be provided with very clear test administration instructions. Instructions and checklists that identify good test administration procedures have been prepared for use by teachers, principals, and district testing directors. Each student test form is assigned a unique form control number and must be accounted for by the school and district. Districts will also be responsible for secure storage of all tests when they are not being administered.

QUESTION: **What are the implications of someone illegally copying or reproducing a test?**

ANSWER: Both federal copyright law as well as state law strictly forbid copying or in any way reproducing the Stanford Achievement Test. The Utah statewide testing law allows for the revocation of certification for such a breach of testing ethics.

QUESTION: **What about the problem of teaching specific test items to students or failing to follow specified test administration procedures?**

ANSWER: The statewide testing law states the following in regard to such activities:

1. *School district employees may not carry on any specific instruction or preparation of students that would be a breach of testing ethics, such as the teaching of specific test questions.*

2. *School district employees who administer the test shall follow the standardization procedures in the publisher's test administration manual and any additional specific instructions developed by the Utah State Board of Education.*

3. *The Utah State Board of Education may revoke the certification of an individual who violates this section.*

QUESTION: **What constitutes appropriate preparation for taking the Stanford?**

ANSWER: Measurement authorities generally agree that appropriate test preparation should include:

1. *Providing general instruction based on the state and district curriculum.*
2. *Equipping students with **general** test-taking skills.*

(See "Test-Taking Tips and Strategies: Student/Parent Pamphlet" and Test-Taking Tips and Strategies: Teacher/Administrator Guidelines" for further information on this topic.)

QUESTION: **What constitutes ethical and unethical test preparation?**

ANSWER: Ethical test preparation—not considered teaching to the test—would include:

- *General instruction on objectives (e.g., the Core Curriculum) that were not determined by looking at any set of published test objectives.*
- *Regular classroom instruction dealing directly with the content of the test (e.g., teaching the Core Curriculum, familiarizing students with a variety of terminology, including that which they are likely to encounter on the test, etc.) but employing classroom assessments that represent a variety of formats.*
- *Instruction covering test-taking skills that relate to a variety of test formats incorporated throughout the year into regular instruction.*
- *Increasing motivation for improved performance through appeals to students, parents, and teachers about the importance of taking testing seriously.*
- *Checking answer sheets to make sure that each has been properly completed (only to the extent that the test developer recommends it, or all units that are being compared engage in the same practice).*

Unethical test preparation—considered teaching to the test—would include:

- *Instruction limited to objectives that specifically match those on the test to be taken (e.g., excluding parts of the Core Curriculum that are not covered by the CRTs).*
- *Instruction based on objectives that specifically match those on the test to be taken following the same format (e.g., using the same content, scenarios, activities) as the test questions.*

- *Special instruction and practice based directly on a current or previous form of the test.*
- *Using questions from current or previous forms of the test, or any practice questions that are parallel to those on the test, as practice tests before students actually take the test.*
- *Using commercially prepared score-boosting materials, or other activities aimed specifically at boosting scores.*
- *Dismissing low-achieving students on test day to artificially boost scores.*

QUESTION: **What role does student attitude play in test performance?**

ANSWER: The students' attitude toward testing is critical to their performance. Teachers' attitudes also play a significant role. Every effort should be made by teachers and administrators to communicate the importance of this testing experience to students.

QUESTION: **What does educational research say about improving student performance?**

ANSWER: The following are examples of key findings pertaining to improving student performance:

- Teach for attainment of both basic and higher-order skills.
- Use instructional methods appropriate to the curriculum goal.
- Monitor individual performance.
- Provide meaningful and timely feedback.
- Maintain good class management.
- Maximize academic learning time.
- Set high expectations.

QUESTION: **What is measured by the Stanford 9?**

ANSWER: The Stanford 9 measures student achievement in the following areas: reading, mathematics, language, science, and social studies. Reading and mathematics are further broken out by specific scores, such as reading comprehension and mathematics computation. *Stanford 9 Core Curriculum Links* has been made

available to all schools in multiple copies. This publication both describes the subtests in the battery and presents the major objectives covered in each subtest.

QUESTION: **Should the Stanford measure everything that is in the curriculum?**

ANSWER: Norm-referenced tests like the Stanford can only ***sample*** the total curriculum. Curriculum for all levels and subjects is much more detailed than any test. In addition, the Stanford is a commercially-developed test that was developed to measure a general curriculum, not the Utah State Core Curriculum specifically.

QUESTION: **Who scores the tests?**

ANSWER: All test scoring for grades five, eight, and eleven will be accomplished by the Data Processing Section at the Utah State Office of Education.

QUESTION: **Who is paying for tests and scoring?**

ANSWER: All costs of testing at grades five, eight, and eleven are being paid by the state through a legislative appropriation.

QUESTION: **When will results be available?**

ANSWER: Initial results, such as individual student and school profiles, will be made available to school districts by mid-November. These will be the same kinds of reports that have typically been produced through the test scoring service at the Utah State Office of Education. It is highly recommended that the report titled "Home Profile," showing individual student results, be shared with both students and parents.

QUESTION: **How will results be reported to local boards, the public, and the Legislature as mandated by the law?**

ANSWER: In December, a series of special reports will be produced and sent to each local school district for them to share with their board of education and the public. These reports will feature ***actual median scores***, which were obtained by

schools and districts, as well as ***predicted score ranges***, which allow a comparison between a school median and a range of scores that would be expected in schools with similar students. Essentially, this same report format will be included for each district and school as a section of the State Superintendent's Annual Report.

QUESTION: **Can the results be used to compare districts and schools?**

ANSWER: The most relevant kinds of comparisons examine the performance of a school or district to itself in studying trends over time.

QUESTION: **Who should I contact if I want more information?**

ANSWER: Your first contact would be your local district testing director. These individuals are listed on the following page.

DISTRICT TESTING DIRECTORS

Alpine	Frank Cameron	**Nebo**	Nedra Call
Beaver	Donald Willden	**North Sanpete**	Karen Kowalski
Box Elder	Steven B. Johnson	**North Summit**	Sandy Jaussi
Cache	Chad Downs	**Ogden**	Ed Freestone
Carbon	Tom Roush	**Park City**	Merry Haugen
Daggett	Supt. Gerold Erickson	**Piute**	Supt. Randy Johnson
Davis	Chris Wahlquist	**Provo**	Patti Harrington
Duchesne	Jack Bell	**Rich**	Jane Hatch
Emery	Jon Crawford	**Salt Lake City**	Joan Reynolds
Garfield	Supt. Philip Blais	**San Juan**	Toni Turk
Grand	Margaret Hopkin	**Sevier**	Dixie Betenson
Granite	Darryl Thomas	**South Sanpete**	Darrell Warren
Iron	Steve Baker	**South Summit**	Tim Jones
Jordan	Cal Newbold	**Tintic**	Jyll Bullard
Juab	Alan Sperry	**Tooele**	Delajean Berry
Kane	Shirl Spencer	**Uintah**	Bill Murphy
Logan	Richard Jensen	**Wasatch**	Steve Leatham
Millard	Scott Bassett	**Washington**	James S. Johnson
Morgan	Tiffany Murray	**Wayne**	Burke Torgerson
Murray	Al Church	**Weber**	Jed Waddoups

For information in the following specific areas, contact:

- Dr. Barbara J. Lawrence, Coordinator, Statewide Testing Program, Utah State Office of Education, (801) 538-7810.
- Don Eardley, Test Scoring and Reporting, Utah State Office of Education, (801) 538-7916.
- Max Tudor, test publisher's Utah representative, (702) 782-2556 or 1-800-228-0752, Ext. 5091.

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